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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9842
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 4056
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0269
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4671
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0535
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0429
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 0553
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4261
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 2552
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0574
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1210
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1253
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000706

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, AND SCA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: SUBJECT: UZBEK JOURNALIST DETAINED ON DRUG CHARGES

Classified By: Classified By: IO Molly Stephenson for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

¶1. (C) On June 17, Information Officer met with Bahram Abdurahmanov, the brother and lawyer of detained journalist Salijon Abdurahmanov, in the western city of Nukus, Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. Abdurahmanov formerly worked for Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and more recently contributed to independent news website uznews.net.

¶2. (C) According to his brother, Abdurahmanov and a friend were stopped at Dostoyara Street by Nukus traffic police at about 7:00 pm on June 7. When Abdurahmanov was unable to present identification (he had forgotten his driver's license at home), the police searched his vehicle with two sniffer dogs. (Note: This is unusual since dogs are not typically assigned to standard traffic police, though random drug searches by traffic police have been known to occur occasionally. End note.) The police claimed that the dogs had found something suspicious, but Abdurahmanov and his friend saw no overt reaction from the dogs. The traffic police then called in a special squadron to conduct a thorough search of the car and discovered two plastic bags of narcotics 114.18 grams of marijuana and 5.89 grams of opium beneath the fuel tank. According to the brother, the marijuana bag was wrapped in a Kazakh newspaper dating from October 2005.

¶3. (C) According to the brother, Salijon Abdurahmanov and his friend were detained immediately. Both Abdurahmanov's and his friend's homes were searched. Abdurahmanov's work documents and computer were confiscated and are now held at the investigations department. Abdurahmanov was forced to sign each confiscated document. While the computer had not yet been opened as of June 17, Abdurahmanov may soon need to sign the printouts of each file on his computer. Nothing incriminating was found nor confiscated from Abdurahmanov's friend's home and he was released after 24 hours. This friend then shared what had happened with Abdurahmanov's brother and lawyer Bahram.

¶4. (C) Abdurahmanov remains in custody and was formally

arrested on June 10. His brother visited him on June 17 and shared that he was healthy, in "good spirits," and with "no complaints" about his treatment. They filed an appeal to the Karakalpakstan Supreme Court on June 13, but were officially denied on June 16. The local authorities have not shared the timeline for processing the case. Abdurahmanov's brother believes that "the officials themselves do not know." According to a June 18 [uznews.net](#) article, Abdurahmanov has been charged under Article 276 Clause 2A of the Uzbek Criminal Code with "the illegal production, purchase and storing of drugs without the intent to distribute," which carries a penalty of three to five years imprisonment.

¶5. (C) Abdurahmanov's brother shared that he is cooperating with the International Human Rights Society, also known as Ezgulik, and others human rights groups in Uzbekistan, and has answered questions from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, BBC and other international organizations. He has not "hid any realities" and is convinced that local authorities planted the drugs to gain access to his brother's professional files. He believes that the authorities "will not find anything illegal" and "justice will find its course." An unconfirmed June 18 [uznews.net](#) article alleged that blood tests conducted on Abdurahmanov demonstrated that he had not used drugs. The article also denied an earlier independent [uzmetronom.com](#) website report that Abdurahmanov had admitted to using drugs (Note: Both websites have been unreliable sources of information in the past. End note).

¶6. (C) Comment: While Salijon Abdurahmanov is not well known to the Embassy or to journalists or human rights activists in Tashkent, the Press Office had noticed a recent increase in critical reporting about Karakalpakstan on independent site [uznews.net](#). We suspect that Abdurahmanov may have drafted these reports. Abdurahmanov's detention appears to be another unfortunate example of the government's efforts to harass and intimidate independent journalists despite Uzbek President Karimov's personal call for greater press freedom. We also believe, from our own discussions with the MFA, that the subject of Karakalpak independence sentiment, which the [uznews.net](#) articles reported, is a very sensitive one for the government. Post will work to provide whatever support possible to journalists who strive to bolster press freedom in Uzbekistan.

NORLAND